

Amendments to the Drawings:

The Examiner requests new drawings. Applicant submits formal drawings along with this amendment.

REMARKS

Status of the Claims

Reconsideration of this application, as amended, is respectfully requested. Claims 1-18 and 26-30 remain in the application. Claims 1-10, and 26-30 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,496,595 of Puchek et al. ("Puchek") in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,353,853 of Gravlin ("Gravlin") and in further view of Diagneault US publication No. 20020029349. Claims 11-18 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Puchek in view of Gravlin in further view of Diagneault and in even further view of Schmitt of U.S. Patent No. 5,903,225.

Applicants respectfully assert that Claims 1-10, and 26-30 are patentable over the above rejections.

Puchek qualifies as prior art only under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) because its filing date of May 19, 2000 is 3 months earlier than Applicant's filing date. Applicants submit herewith an affidavit under 37 C.F.R. § 1.131 that the invention as claimed in claims 1-18 and 26-30 was reduced to practice prior to the May 19, 2000 filing date of Puchek. Therefore, Puchek is not available as prior art under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e), and Applicant accordingly requests that Puchek be removed from consideration. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests the withdrawal of the rejection of claims 1-18 and 26-30 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a).

CONCLUSION

Applicants respectfully submit that the rejections have been overcome by the amendments and remarks, and that the pending claims are in condition for allowance. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request the rejections be withdrawn and the pending claims be allowed.

If there are any additional charges, please charge Deposit Account No. 02-2666 for any fee deficiency that may be due.

Respectfully submitted,

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